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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research into the concept of mentoring from many educational perspectives, based on six papers presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in April 1994. The paper notes that mentoring is a slippery concept, without a precise operational definition; definitions used in the six papers are discussed. The paper also discusses the absence of general agreement on concept paradigms; the exploration of expanded concepts associated with mentoring, including nurturing relationships and clinical education; problems with normative surveys as vehicles for understanding the benefits of applying the concept of mentoring in administrator or leader preparation; alternative lines of inquiry, such as carefully recorded case studies; and the role of the institution as mentor. The paper concludes that the use of classic novels and stories of mentors and their proteges would provide greater benefit over additional normative studies. (JDD)

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# Mentoring, Mentors and Protégés

by

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"All their little society entered into this laudable design, according to their different abilities. Their little piece of ground produced a plentiful crop. Cunegonde was indeed very homely, but she became an excellent pastry cook. Paquetta worked at embroidery, and the old woman took care of the linen. There was no idle person in the company, not excepting even Grofflee; he made a very good carpenter, and became a very honest man.

As to Pangloss (the mentor), he evidently had a lurking consciousness that his theory required unceasing exertions, and all his ingenuity, to sustain it. Yet he stuck to it to the last; his thinking and talking faculties could hardly be diverted from it for a moment. He seized every occasion to say to Candide, 'All the events in this best of possible worlds are admirably connected. If a single link in the great chain were omitted, the harmony of the entire universe would be destroyed. If you had not been expelled from that beautiful castle, with those cruel kicks, for your love to Miss Cunegonde; If you had not travelled over a great portion of America on foot; if you had not plunged your sword through the baron; if you had not lost all the sheep you brought from that fine country, Eldorado, together with the riches with which they were laden, you would not be here today, eating pistachio nuts.'

"That's very well said, and may all be true," said Candide; 'but let's cultivate our garden.'" (Voltaire, *Candide*)

Discussion of the Papers Presented on Mentoring  
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## **Mentoring is a common thread in the teaching and practice of school leadership**

Permit me at the outset to thank those who sent your manuscripts before this session. It was my good fortune to hear versions of the Maine and Pittsburgh papers at a similar session during the February meeting of the American Association of School Administrators. I also heard Daresh and Playko discuss their handbook on mentoring in 1990 at the University Council for Educational Administration annual meeting in Pittsburgh. The discussant's task is much easier when papers arrive ahead of the meeting and when there has been an association with earlier works of the authors.

The six papers of this session report research into the concept of mentoring from many perspectives. Yet, from these separate perspectives, the authors weave a common thread. Mentoring in the classic literature is frequently advocated and practiced by universities in leadership development programs and by professional administrators in educational settings. One of the papers is an analysis of the transformation of students undergoing personal development at the Maine Academy for School Leaders. Another paper reports an attempt to find the benefits of an experiment in mentoring in Great Britain. Three of the papers expanded knowledge of mentoring through surveys of practice. A sixth paper reports on the departmental program of educational administration at the University of Pittsburgh in their selection procedures and use of superintendent mentors. All report that mentoring is a complex topic with many different activities encompassed within the concept. If this session provides no more, we have collected in one place six serious studies of the concept of mentoring that enlarge the knowledge of practice in this area. We also learn from these studies that finding effects of mentoring is quite a difficult chore.

## **Like leadership, mentoring is a slippery concept**

Although educators commonly use the term, *mentoring*, a precise operational definition of the word that could serve as a template to judge whether a person is doing mentoring or not, or is doing mentoring well or poorly, is difficult to ascertain. For example, in the papers reviewed, the concept as used among these authors is a very slippery one that slides into as many crevices as one wishes to explore. One problem with the word may be that it is a convenient label for any of the complex activities we associate with teaching or coaching of professionals. Too narrow interpretation of the label leads to such a specialized meaning that most would object to limitations on use of the term from the outset. How then do presenters in this session define mentoring?

Daresh and Playko acknowledge that mentoring is not a simple idea. Their analysis that "it is a difficult concept" mirrors the statement of Brown *et al.* who agree that "...mentoring is often a complex process". Daresh and Playko illustrate the complexity in describing the interpersonal relationship of the mentor. They state that "simply matching pairs of administrators and calling one a mentor does not mean that a true developmental and supportive relationship exists." It is evident that "*a true developmental and supportive relationship*" is the preferred definition of Daresh and Playko. Luna uses a similar concept in describing "functional" supportive relationships.

Thody and Crystal, after citing several prominent definitions, adopt the British national principals' recommended definition with five functions: namely, catalyst, linkage broker, solutions guide, problem solver, buddy and a sixth catch all function called "other." This definition has two advantages. First, it implies a kind of orthodoxy in its national scope, and, second, the definition provides a basis for evaluating benefits to the protégés.

Brown *et al.* add an ordered classification to the concept of mentoring. They define mentoring with three levels that characterize the relationships shared between mentors and protégés over time. The classifications are designated as "primary," "secondary," and "professional colleague." The struggle to find clarity and agreements within the various definitions of mentoring suggests difficulties authors and researchers encounter with narrowing the concept to a small set of distinct criteria for teaching, observing, and research analysis of the concept. Yet, as demonstrated by the papers of Daresh and Playko, Brown *et al.*, and Luna, laymen and professionals share a basic concept of the mentor and protégé relationship as one where a high degree of trust exists in the advisory and nurturing role of the mentor acting to benefit the protégé. These definitions lack the developmental nature through progressive stages of development of the protégé that Little and Lanier used in defining mentoring in teacher education. Mentor status is also missing from these definitions.

Mentoring allows for mediated career entry in which novices move gradually from simple to more demanding tasks, and from modest to substantial responsibility, all under the supervision of acknowledged masters whose skill and longevity have earned them status within the occupation. Mentors are in a position to transmit valued knowledge and skill, to socialize newcomers to the institutional culture, and to influence future career opportunities. (p. 56)

Bloom in a study of mentor relations during the development of concert pianists and Olympic swimmers identified three stages of development that required quite different mentors and quite different relationships between the mentor and protégé. In the early phase, the protégé needs a nurturant mentor who encourages exploration of the talent and interest of the protégé that helps the protégé make a commitment to one or more fields for concentration. In the second phase, Bloom found that the mentor had to be a skill developer, and in the third and final stage of development that only a few reach like national class superintendents, principals, and teachers, the national class swimmers and concert pianists all learn artistry from a limited number of mentors worldwide. Artistic phase mentors could not be bothered with skill development, nor could skill developers tolerate the nurturance required during exploration at the beginning of a career. This finding, if generalizable to the development of educational leaders, suggests that we should examine the developmental cycle of educational leaders to determine levels of mentoring that correlates with the developmental stages of protégés. In these papers, Brown *et al.* examined whether certain kinds of mentors and mentor behaviors differ with the various stages of development through which protégés pass.

### Limits to further utility of normative research approached in mentoring studies

A frequent problem encountered with normative research is the absence of general agreement to concept paradigms to be used as standards or criteria against which to compare observations. Both the papers of Daresh and Playko and of Brown *et al.* rediscover the now ancient problem of attributing causation and quality to normative observations. To their credit, these authors acknowledge that there is a paucity of theoretical literature with which to compare the practices observed as either worthy or unworthy. These authors and others in mentoring inquiry commonly find a widespread use of the concept in educational leadership and teacher education with little common agreement about the essential components mentoring.

### Concept overlap opens the door to inclusion of related concepts

As a result of their analyses three authors open the door to exploration of expanded rather than narrowly specialized study of the concepts associated with mentoring or nurturing the development of educational leaders. The concept of the nurturing relationship (Daresh and Playko, p. 6) is capable of exploration under many topics. Whether or not mentoring is an umbrella concept offers a valuable key to understanding some of the problems encountered in the multiplicity of practices that are included in the general notion of mentoring. One must ask at this point, is mentoring an inclusive concept that will later lead to synthesis of a taxonomy of nurturing relationships between professionals, or will some other concept emerge that is more inclusive?

Peper (1988) suggested that the larger concept is "clinical education" and that mentoring is but one of the components of an adequate clinical program. Goodlad prefers the metaphor of the professional development school where, much like the medical school model, students are assigned to a teaching school much like the medical intern is assigned to a clinical or teaching hospital.

If mentoring is narrowly construed, will mentoring become a professional specialist's domain with its own specialized literature? To some extent, three authors suggest a broad rather than a specialized construction of the concept of mentoring. Playko and Daresh described several kinds of activities even when the concept of mentoring is focussed on the relationship between mentor and protégé. Brown *et al.* expand the concept to types of relationship transactions. Donaldson further enlarges the concept to sets of institutional functions rather than a narrow pursuit of the relationship between mentor and protégé. All three seem to be leading to a conclusion that there is an expanded concept for professional education, and that, while important, the mentoring role is but a single concept among a multiple set of practices and ideas that will guide the development of the professional education of educational leaders.

### Discussion of the findings about concept use

Daresh and Playko (p. 10) found that "...the mentoring schemes of greatest interest to researchers in the United States involved preservice administrator preparation mentoring relationships." Both Daresh and Playko and Brown *et al.* found that mentoring is permeates both administrative practice and administrator education. Clarity of what the concept includes to various professionals and professors was lacking, and the normative fallacy poses a huge problem for survey research to surmount. These findings imply that modes of research inquiry other than normative surveys may prove better vehicles for understanding benefits of applying the concept of mentoring in administrator or leader preparation.

Translating knowledge to practice is extremely difficult in education because as a profession we lack a structure for endorsing and regulating orthodoxy of professional practice. Consider for a moment how far advanced present observations in the field of mentoring would be if the mentoring handbook of Daresh and Playko were widely distributed, understood, and used in practice by colleges of education and by professional administrators. Unlike the medical profession, where clinical education and clinical practice coincide in a well defined approval structure for orthodox practice, education has few controlling organizations with the necessary power to enforce the use of approved strategies.



At best educational scholars are a loose knit group of kindred spirits who share research at meetings such as this. Thus, it is not surprising to learn that survey research reveals lack of common expectations and practices in mentoring. One may celebrate this phenomenon or lament lack of orthodoxy. But the lack of orthodoxy contributes to the difficulty in making professional advances in knowledge generation and in practice. Until and unless there is more commitment to an orthodoxy in education, at least in definitions and terminology, we are likely to continue to observe relatively low levels of understanding and use of basic concepts such as mentoring in education.

### Alternative lines of inquiry suggested

In their review of the benefits to be derived from other evaluations we find the following quote in Daresh and Playko:

It may be concluded that such studies were either cases of researchers overgeneralizing their conclusions from limited findings, or situations where the purposes of the studies were unclear in the first place." ( p. 12).

As a result of their analyses since the mid 1980s, Daresh and Playko recommend alternative lines of inquiry to normative studies for further research since "...the paths already established for the study of mentoring will do little to increase the knowledge base in an area that will continue to grow in significance." They further conclude that such research is necessary because the practice is of mentoring is on the increase. However, William Tyre of the Uncommon Individual Foundation at Radnor, Pennsylvania sees the concept of mentoring on the decline in business and industry primarily because there is little hard evidence of desirable benefits. "Businesses are discovering after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars that it (mentoring) didn't accomplish magical things (El Paso Times, August 30, 1992)."

Attributing benefits to a practice as diffuse and illusive as mentoring is at least as difficult as determining benefits of psychotherapy, or in evaluation of visual and performing arts. To define benefit in each case requires a high level of sophistication in detecting barely noticeable nuances of difference in human behavior and feelings. Patient and psychiatrist's testimonies frequently are the most respected data collection procedures in psychiatry. Impressions of visual art and dramatic performances are legitimate evaluative criteria in those fields. Perhaps it is time that we expand our idea of appropriate evaluation methodology for slippery concepts like mentoring.

Carefully recorded case studies reveal more insight to the effects of psychiatry as in the case of *Sibyl* than thousands of normative studies. There is much to be learned from mentoring cases that are documented in classic literature. Nomination of models of writing style could be drawn from *Emile* or *Candide*, or from William James on the use of vignettes to capture insights into thoughts and feelings through descriptions of behavior.

One cannot ignore the benefit of case studies and biographical reports when Donaldson's paper is read carefully. He manages to excerpt from protégé records a substantial insight into leadership development experienced by students at the Maine Academy for School Leaders. The coordinated use of personal biographies, peer and mentor conversations combined with the exploratory nature of the principal and teacher leaders in Maine offer one such form of alternative exploration.

## Institution as mentor

Brown *et al.* report on an inclusive concept of mentoring or support with mentor portrayed as institution rather than as an individual. This is intriguing because it raises the possibility that institutionally coordinated mentoring is a set of functions and relationships that may much more beneficial for personal development than the single relationship between mentor or mentors and a protégé. Donaldson's case reports elaborate the role of institutional clinical development of leaders without all the fuss over finding just the right mentor and the just right coupling concept. By assigning mentor superintendents, the Pittsburgh model as reported by DeFigio could also be seen as an institutional rather than an individual mentoring program even though individual superintendents form interpersonal relationships with protégés in the program. Superintendents in the Florida are connected in a similar way with mentor superintendents through a third party broker. When the institution broadens the scope of mentoring as has the Maine program, a logical positivist would be required to ask is this new concept really mentoring? Or is mentoring one of the activities within the broader program described by Donaldson and his colleagues?

Donaldson's findings lead me to interpretations that may not be justified. However, his report presents clear documentation of an operant value toward leadership in education that may be emergent or even dominant in this country, but it is also a view that is not representative of how leadership has been viewed traditionally. The student biographies report reflections of leadership made by students in Maine while becoming school leaders.

I reflected at length on the Donaldson paper from the perspective of leadership at Chrysler during the 1980s whose mission in part was to manufacture automobiles and pay a profit to the stockholders. Would Lee Iaccoca or other industry leaders have come to similar conclusions when they met resistance in the workplace? If they had, where would Chrysler be today?

In part, the Donaldson paper is a treatise on leadership in public education. From the beginning to the end of over sixteen months, students gradually shift their personal beliefs about leadership from an early focus on student attainment and development in the schools to self analysis and an expanding commitment to interpersonal relations. The shift in emphasis occurs as the student colleagues describe their problems with natural resistance to their leadership initiatives in the schools. Toward the end of the sixteen months, students develop personal coping strategies and rationalize a new personal concept of leadership within a largely collegial framework.

Donaldson, through the cases cited, may be providing an accurate portrait of the reality of public school governance where successful school leaders, unlike successful private sector leaders, are only able to function effectively as leaders in a collegial model. Regardless of whether this is a justifiable interpretation of the information provided by Donaldson, his method exhibits powerful insights into leadership development and is worthy of more widespread use for research into concepts like mentoring.

## Summary and Conclusions

The concept of leadership development in United States public schools is one in which all of us share a keen interest. Each of the authors makes a major contribution in the continuing struggle to improve education for school leaders. My conclusions after reading these papers on mentoring are that normative studies have about exhausted their yield of new information on mentoring. Perhaps this is the case because there is so little difference in the practice of mentoring, and because the

concept remains relatively underdeveloped in practice. I am impressed with the methodology used by Donaldson to document change from the perspective of protégés. The proposal of Daresh and Playko to seek other means of research for mentoring or other developmental concepts, dare I suggest "clinical" concepts, is promising. I am particularly impressed with the amount of knowledge that can be gained from well constructed biographies and narrative reflections of practice. It is my opinion that the use of classic novels and stories of mentors and their protégés would provide greater benefit than additional normative studies. I have suggested a few examples above. While preparing for this discussion, I discovered over one hundred novels, plays, biographies and stories about mentoring. Perhaps an analysis of this literature would also yield considerable insight into the concept of mentoring.

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